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MILK RIVER WATERSHED NEWS

Milk River to Receive $500,000 in State Grants

By Mike Dailey, MT DNRC

The Montana Legislature and Governor Martz approved the funding of five Renewable Resource Grant applications submitted by Milk River applicants. The grant sponsors and what the grants are to accomplish are identified in Table 1.

Many Milk River folks went to Helena to make this happen. The process started back on January 16 when they testified for two days in front of the Joint Appropriations Long-Range Planning Subcommittee. They testified on the many important issues facing water users in the basin such as the need to restore the aging and failing project facilities, the need to mitigate the effects of reserved water rights on the Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Indian Reservations and at the Bowdoin Wildlife Refuge, and the fact that the basin's economy depends on Milk and St. Mary river water for survival.

To help the grant applications, Max Maddox of the Alfalfa Valley Irrigation District, hauled a ten foot long, eight foot diameter section of the St. Mary siphon to Helena a week before the hearing on the grants. He displayed the section of the siphon prominently on the back lawn of the Capitol. During a brief recess, the legislators on the Long-Range Planning and Natural Resource Committees visited the siphon section and listened as Maddox and others explained the deteriorating condition of the two siphons. A photo of the legislatures in front of the pipe can be seen on page 3.

The Milk River water users made a positive impression during their two days in Helena. Of the seventy-three applications brought before the Long-Range Planning Committee, nine of them were from the Milk River Project - five of which were funded. Testimony and discussions brought to light the major concerns in the Milk River Basin. Representative Dave Kasten (HD 99) from Brockway, Chairman of the Long-Range Planning Subcommittee voiced his empathy and

(Grants Continued on Page 3)

Table 1. Successful Milk River Project Renewable Resources Grants

Applicant	Project	Amount
Paradise Valley Irrigation District	Pressurize pump and pipelines on the Hillside Lateral project.	$100,000
Chinook Division Irrigation Joint Board of Control	Replace worn seals on the regulating gates at Fresno Dam	$100,000
Milk River Project Joint Board of Control	Replace six worn expansion joints on the St. Mary Siphon.	$100,000
Malta Irrigation District	Replace 34 old check structures throughout the Malta Irrigation District	$100,000
Fort Belknap Irrigation District	Install pipe for the Sugar Factory Lateral where it passes through the City of Chinook.	$100,000

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OPINION

Canadian Dam on the Milk Could Harm U.S. Irrigators

By Randy Reed

The proposed Canadian dam on the Milk has been a topic of much discussion lately. There is a perception that the dam in Canada will benefit Milk River water users in the United States. Actually, there may be nothing to gain and much to lose.

The Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 treats the St. Mary and Milk Rivers as one river system with the combined waters to be divided equally between Canada and the U.S. However, the 1921 International Joint Commission Order (IJC) treats the two rivers separately giving Canada considerably more water. The Order states that during the irrigation season (April 1 - October 31), Canada's share of the St. Mary is ¾ of the natural flow when it is 666 cfs or less, and flows over 666 cfs are divided 50/50. The Order also states that this division formula is reciprocated on the Milk River, where the United States' share of the Milk is ¾ of the natural flow when flows is 666 cfs or less, and flows above 666 cfs are divided equally. The problem is that the average annual flow of the St. Mary River is approximately 650,000 acre-feet/year, or five times more than the Milk River, which is only 125,000 acre-feet/year. Further, St. Mary flows are rather consistent, while Milk River flows are erratic with frequent extremely wet and dry periods and with many summers of no flow.

Besides this disparity with the existing 1921 Order, the U.S. surpluses or gives Canada an additional 80,000 acre-feet/year of its share of water from the St. Mary. This occurs because the U.S. lacks enough storage on the St. Mary River. While Canada surpluses an average of only 30,000 acre-feet/year of the Milk River to the U.S. The difference between Canada's inability to store water on the Milk as compared to the our inability to store and divert water on the St. Mary causes an average net loss of about 50,000 acre-feet per year to the U.S.

Construction of a Canadian dam on the Milk River will have an adverse impact on Milk River irrigators. The U.S. would lose much of the early runoff that runs into Fresno during the spring, which is used to start up the irrigation season while waiting for the St. Mary's high elevation snows to melt. Some people feel that a Canadian dam would be a cost effective approach to dealing with siltation of Fresno Reservoir - which it might be. But the downside is that Alberta will capture its share of the early spring water allowing the Province to add about 20,000 acres of new irrigation. The Milk River is already water short and over appropriated. If Alberta builds a Dam on the Milk, even during average moisture years, we could see further water-shortages that could dry up 20,000 to 30,000 acres of existing irrigation on the Milk River Project, which now receives only marginal water supplies.

In conclusion, the U.S. is already at a disadvantage with the existing division of the Milk and St. Mary rivers, which is skewed in Canada's favor, costing the U.S. at least 40,000 to 50,000 acre-feet per year. The only way to counter a Canadian dam on the Milk would be to build a much larger St. Mary canal, around 1,200 cfs, to bring fairness in the division of the boundary water. A better alternative to a Milk River dam in Alberta would be to construct Babb Dam on the St. Mary River and lease storage space to the Canadians. The Babb Dam would provide the ability to fairly divide the water for both countries.

Whatever the Canadians do, it still must be approved by the IJC. Please write Governor Judy Martz, Congressman Denny Rehberg, and Senators Conrad Burns and Max Baucus to express your concerns about a Canadian Milk River dam and its negative impacts to Montana. ✓

Randy farms in the Milk River Basin near Chinook. He is also chair of the Milk River Project Development Association and a Water Conservation Coordinator for the Paradise Valley Irrigation District.

(Grants Continued from Page 1)

praised basin residents for what they are trying to do and promised to do what he could to help them given the current state fiscal crisis.

On the second day of hearings, Representative Tom Facey of Missoula HD 67, gave a humorous reminiscence of his childhood years growing up around the St. Mary diversion, tagging along with his uncle who worked as a ditch rider on the St. Mary canal. In the end, he spoke favorably, encouraging the committee to "take care" of the Milk River Project.

Subcommittee Member Senator Tropila (SD 24) of Great Falls complimented Kay Blatter for his active involvement in many Milk River activities. He asked him: "How many hats do you wear?". As we know, Kay is Chairman of the Milk River Project Joint Board of Control, the Milk River International Alliance, and President of Fort Belknap Irrigation District. Mr. Blatter provided favorable testimony during both days of testimony for all of the Milk River grant applications.

Of the 73 grant applications, about 40 were funded (some partially), amounting to a 55 percent success rate. Five of the nine Milk River Project grants were fully funded to the tune of $500,000. This year, about $4 million will be available for project funding in HB 6.

If you are interested in the status of legislative bills, you can track them on the World Wide Web at: http://www.leg.state.mt.us. ✓

Milk River Project Irrigators pose with legislators from the Long-Range Planning Committee and the Natural Resource Committee in front of a section of the St. Mary Siphon on the back lawn of the Capitol in Helena in January. Photographed left to right are: Bim Strausser, Randy Reed, Max Maddox, Rep.Christine Kaufmann, Rep John Musgrove, Rep Jeff Pattison, Rep Dave Kasten, Kay Blatter, Melvin Novak, Sen Joe Tropila, Sen Linda Nelson, Jack Gist, Rep. John Witt, Rep Rick Ripley, John Lacey, and Sen Bill Tash.

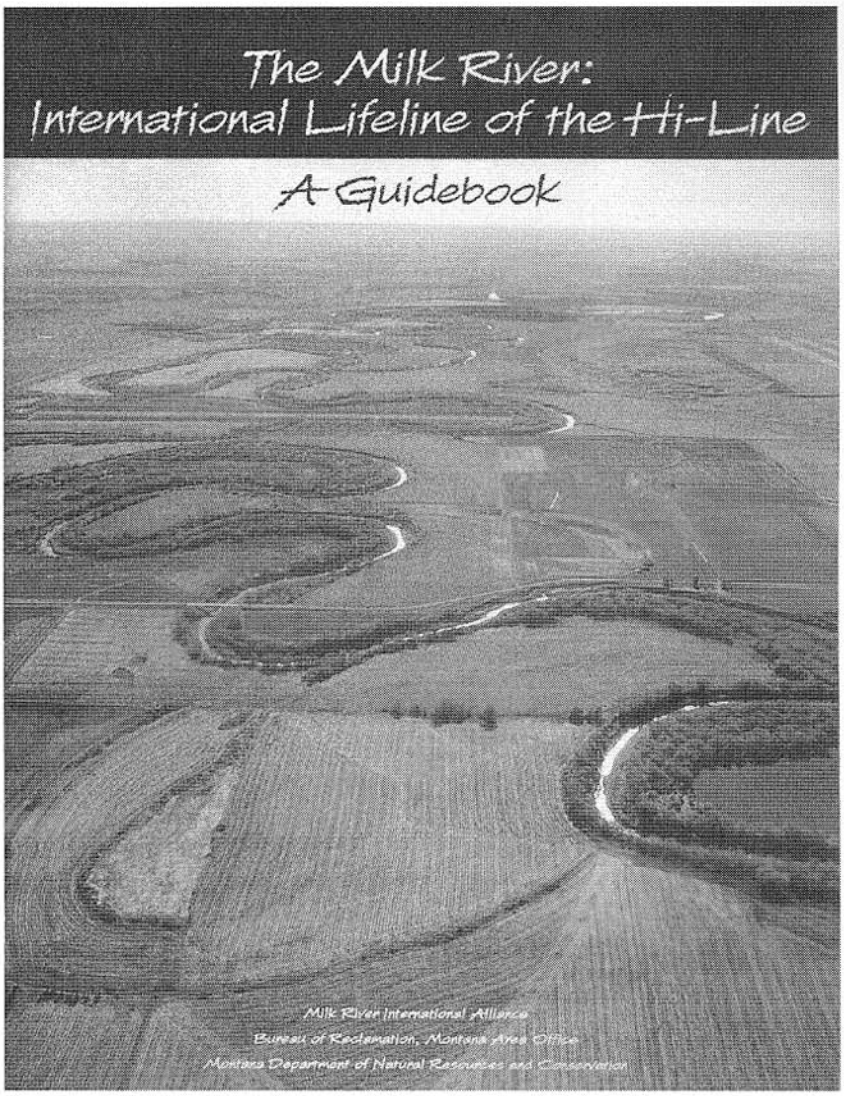
DNRC Water Resources Division Moves

In March of 1996, the DNRC Water Resources Division moved from the Metcalf building on the capitol complex to downtown on the walking mall. Six years later they have moved back across town to their new home at 1424 9th Ave., just down the street from DNRC's headquarters. Their new location was formerly the headquarters of the Montana Department of Commerce. Department of Administration, General Services Division, has hired Karhu-Cullen Architects who prepared structural, electrical and mechanical drawings. The Water Resources Helena Regional Office has moved into this location also.

They enjoyed being downtown and will miss the good coffee and excitement of the downtown area. But there are many positive sides to the move such as: more space; co-locating with the regional office; much closer to the main DNRC building; and easier accessibility for the public. Maybe the most important benefit of the move will be to the Montana taxpayers, as facilities costs will be reduced by more than half. ✓

Coordinator's Corner

By Jim Thompson



The Milk River International Alliance is pleased to release our new educational guidebook entitled: "The Milk River: International Lifeline of the Hi-Line". This guidebook serves as a learning tool to accompany the award winning video of the same name (the 2000 Bronze Award under the Education Video production category by the Agricultural Communicators in Education). The video, which premiered in 1999 at the "Milk River - Know Your Watershed" workshop in Havre, has been shown numerous times by Montana Public Television. Together, the video and this guidebook provide an enduring information package to serve one of the Alliance's primary goals of providing an ongoing forum for education about the Milk River Watershed.

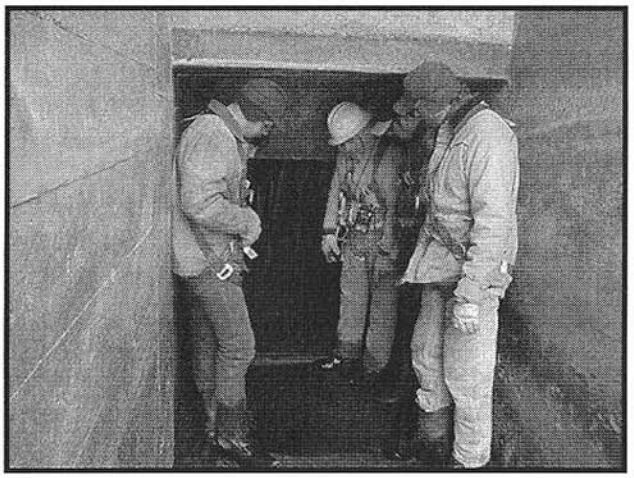
Although this guidebook was prepared under the direction of the Alliance, its creation would not have been possible without the efforts of the many watershed residents who contributed time and energy compiling the information found within the pages. Production and publication were made possible through funding support from the Montana Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The combined support of the Hill, Blaine, Phillips and Valley Conservation Districts was instrumental in obtaining the additional funding for publication and distribution from the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

We hope this guidebook will lead basin residents to discover something new and interesting about the Milk River country - a unique international watershed! For more information about the Alliance, please see page 30 of the guidebook.

Copies of the guidebook can be picked up at your local conservation district office or by calling Kristi Kline in Havre at (406) 265-9031. Copies of the Milk River video can also be checked out from your local conservation district office. ✓

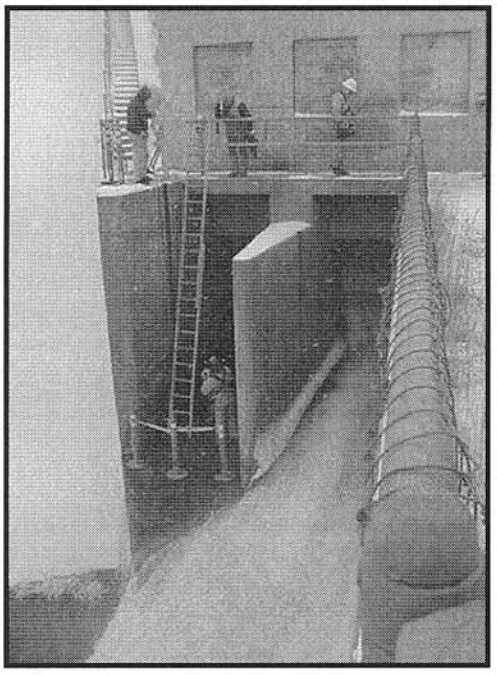
Representatives on the Milk River JBC:

Kay Blatter	Chairman	Fort Belknap Irr. Dist.
Hugh Brookie	Vice-Chairman	Malta Irr. Dist.
Melvin Novak	Secretary	Glasgow Irr. Dist.
Lee Cornwell	Member	Glasgow Irr. Dist.
Jack Gist	Member	Alfalfa Valley Irr. Dist.
Casey Kienenberger	Member	Malta Irr. Dist.
Ralph Snider	Member	Harlem Irr. Dist.
Bruce Anderson	Member	Paradise Valley Irr. Dist.
Brad Tilleman	Member	Zurich Irr. Dist.
Joe Nicholson	Member	Dodson Irr. Dist.

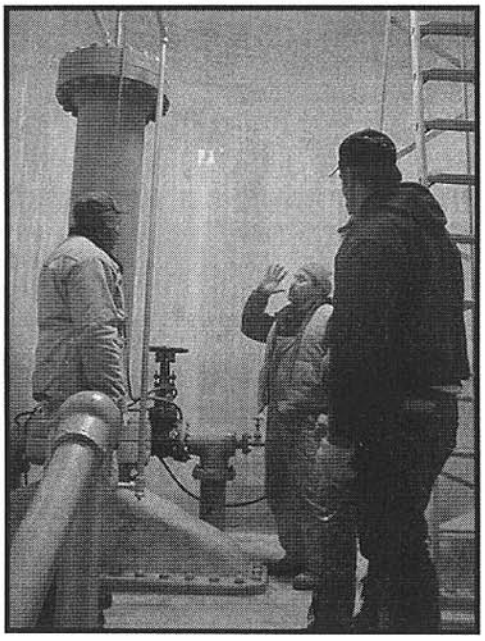


USBR engineer, Jerry Moore, shows irrigators wear due to cavitation on the 65 year-old regulating gate seals at Fresno Dam.

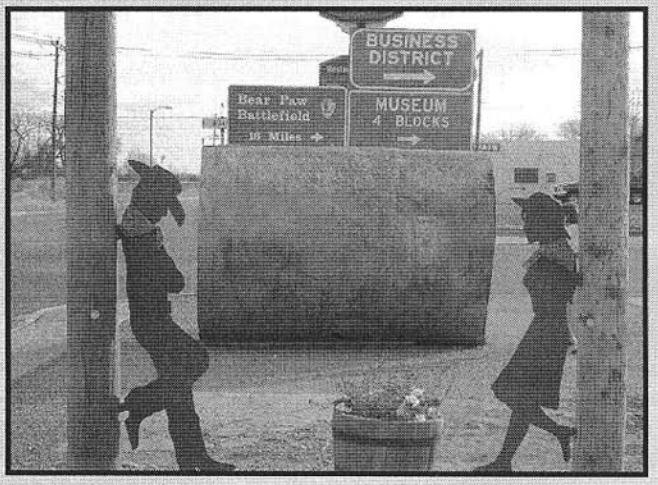
One of the Milk River Project proposals funded with Renewable Resource Grant dollars is the Fresno Dam Gate Leaf Seals replacement project. On a cold, windy, snowy February 21st, USBR personnel gave water users a crash course in confined space entry followed by a tour of the Fresno Dam Facilities.



USBR personnel prepare safety equipment before allowing irrigators to enter the right penstock while water releases of about 40 cfs continue to flow out the left penstock (on right side of photo).



Allan Steiner, USBR facilities manager explains the function and operation of the guard gates at Fresno Dam.



A section of the St. Mary siphon pipe on display in Chinook.

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Milk River Water Supply Looks Good

By Jeremy Giovando, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

The April forecasts are in and the overall water supply conditions look good. This is primarily due to the above-normal storage found in Fresno and Nelson Reservoirs for this time of year. Currently, Nelson is two and half feet from full and Fresno is about three and half feet. However, the current runoff forecast for the Milk River Basin does not look too promising. Only 44 percent of the average inflow is projected for April through July at the Eastern Crossing of the Milk River.

Over in the St. Mary Basin, conditions have been steadily improving. Last month, the basin received significant amounts of precipitation in the form of snow. In addition, the inflow to Lake Sherburne was above normal for March. The current forecasts for the April through July period for Swift Current Creek into Lake Sherburne is projected to be 83 percent of normal and 76 percent of normal for the St. Mary River at the international boundary.

Currently, the natural flows of the Milk River have been high due to low-level snowmelt that produced a peak discharge of approximately 2,000 cfs, at Harlem on March 17. Because of the high flow, the canal diversion to Nelson Reservoir was started on March 17. Thus far, storage in Nelson Reservoir has increased by 10,000 acre-feet. With normal spring rain, the water users should have an adequate water supply. ✓

Reservoir	Storage in acre-feet	Percent of Normal	Percent of Full
Lake Sherburne	19,600	85	30
Fresno Reservoir	92,600	133	100
Nelson Reservoir	54,600 (active)	121	100

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